

Addressing the Challenges of Self-Assessment

Challenge 1: Overestimation

The most consistent challenge associated with self-assessment is the overestimation of skills, abilities, and dispositions. This type of inflation usually means that people rate themselves and their peers higher than an outsider would based on the same evidence. How might the district assist schools to avoid this common pitfall?

- **Enlist outside assistance in conducting the audit**
- **Require specific evidence for the rating of an element**
- **Focus on “school improvement” rather than “accountability”**
- **More than one person/team collecting evidence and establishing a rating for a particular element**
- **Conduct a root cause analysis**

Challenge 2: Bias based on team composition

Another common challenge comes from the “lenses” of the particular team members being used to bias their perceptions. For example, when a team has counselors or social workers on it, many of the findings and solutions appear to be influenced from that way of looking at the world, emphasizing instruction less and environment more. When the team has only teachers of reading/language arts and mathematics, the emphasis either tends to be in those areas rather than looking at the school as a whole or tends to be more favorable to some subject areas and less favorable to others. How might the district assist schools to avoid this common pitfall?

- **Ensure the team has a variety of different backgrounds and/or roles at the school or district**
- **Provide the school/district with a suggested list of membership on the review team**
- **Provide a facilitator to oversee the process**

Challenge 3: Friendships

Teams from districts and schools working in their own arena often do not want to step on the toes of their friends. This makes them reticent to acknowledge shortcomings from people they know well. Teachers oftentimes do not want to surface anything that will make a principal suspicious of a fellow faculty member (or sometimes, just the opposite, picking on someone they don't like!). How might the district assist schools to avoid this pitfall?

- **Rely on data as evidence, not unsubstantiated and perhaps biased reports**
- **Stress the process as one of assessment to determine where the school is (potential solutions) rather than as an evaluation (negative connotation)**

Challenge 4: Politics

Some teams find it politically difficult to say anything but “we are great.” Thus they undermine the evidence and credibility of the process by only considering certain types of data or interpreting data in more positive ways than the data deserve or providing excuses (e.g., oh, that was an off year because the teacher had family issues or it’s just that one difficult kid, without him, everything would be fine.) How might the district assist schools to avoid this common pitfall?

- **Stress the importance of evidence**
- **Identify barriers up front**
- **Share Doug Reeves’ research around 100/100/100 schools**
- **Identify what the school has control over and what it doesn’t, and then move on to address what the school can control**

Challenge 5: Data interpretation-1

Challenges can emerge when team members really do not understand what exemplary practice looks like. For example, if team members are unfamiliar with best practice in differentiated instruction, they may not know how to collect and interpret the classroom observation and the interview data they receive. Likewise, team members may not have the background or training to engage in data analysis as a team, and may find it difficult to understand the complexity of this process. How might the district assist schools to avoid this pitfall?

- **Provide training using videos or other models of effective teaching strategies**
- **Provide training to improve inter-rater reliability**
- **Provide guiding questions to develop analytic thinking**
- **Have specialized personnel from the district assist in specific areas (a data analyst or curriculum director)**

Challenge 5: Data interpretation-2

Team members may not know the appropriate ways to weight the data. For example, should they “trust” the point-in-time classroom observations more than the focus group responses? Should they rely more on student perceptions or teacher perceptions when these perceptions disagree? Are there requirements that could be put in place that will help schools undertaking this process to ensure they address this challenge?

- **Stress triangulation of data to support conclusions**
- **Have specialized personnel from the district assist in specific areas (a data analyst or curriculum director)**
- **Have external entity do the audit**